

5.0 PUBLIC INVOLVEMENT

5.1 Introduction

Public involvement has been a critical component in the LCA study process and the development of the TSP. This section summarizes the public participation efforts during the LCA study process, and identifies future opportunities for public involvement and input as LCA Plan formulation transitions into plan implementation. Full documentation and discussion of public involvement and outreach efforts are included in the DPEIS.

While the first official public meetings under the LCA Study occurred in April 2002, relevant public involvement and input regarding the study began in the late 1990s during the development of the Coast 2050 Plan report. The extensive public participation and input during the development of that consensus-based report generated a coast wide vision for restoration efforts and identified numerous restoration strategies and specific restoration projects. As detailed in section 3.3 PLAN FORMULATION, the vision and strategies in the Coast 2050 Plan served as the basis for the 905(b) reconnaissance report.

5.2 Phased Public Participation Meetings

Throughout public participation process for the LCA Study, the USACE and LDNR sought input from individuals and local governments across the coastal area, academia, state and Federal agencies, and other stakeholders, such as environmental, navigation, commercial fishing, recreation, agricultural, and oil and gas interests. In addition, the USACE and LDNR kept the public informed throughout the study process through the use of web sites, news articles, and radio interviews. Stakeholder groups, such as the Governor's Advisory Commission on Coastal Restoration and Conservation, also helped to keep their constituents abreast of changes or new developments during the study process.

The LCA Study included three sets of public participation meetings, two sets of public scoping meetings associated with the PEIS, and a series of USACE/LDNR-sponsored stakeholder meetings. Future meetings to solicit comments on the DPEIS are scheduled for July and/or August 2004. The subject matter and date for each set of meetings already held are as follows:

- Initial Scoping for LCA Study and PEIS – April 2002
- Update on Status of the LCA Study Process – February 2003
- LCA Plan Alternatives – May/June 2003
- Stakeholder Roundtable Discussions – July/August 2003
- Final Array of Alternative LCA Plans – August 2003
- Scoping for LCA Plan and PEIS – April 2004

At each of the public meetings, the USACE solicited public input on issues being addressed in the various phases of plan formulation. As part of that effort, background materials were provided to the public on a variety of topics. Materials to assist with various public participation activities included:

- Fact sheet on LCA Study and Coast 2050
- Fact sheet on Evolution of Coastal Restoration in Louisiana
- Fact sheet on Large Scale Studies
- LCA Near-Term Sorting and Critical Needs Criteria Definitions
- LCA Study Public Involvement Fact Sheet
- Fact sheet on roles of various agencies/organizations
- Fact sheet on timeline, milestones, key decision points
- Fact sheet on sources of additional information (web site addresses, agency contacts, document titles, etc.)
- PowerPoint presentations
- Calendar of events/meetings
- Frequently Asked Questions
- Exhibits

The USACE used several methods to facilitate input at public meetings. In each meeting, the public was encouraged to provide written and oral comment on the particular study focus being addressed through comment cards and traditional public comment. In addition, USACE and LDNR representatives were present at each meeting to gather public input from individuals who preferred a one-on-one setting during "open-house" sessions. Some meetings provided the public an opportunity to become more intensively involved with plan formulation through the use of breakout sessions and worksheets. At each breakout session, individuals assembled into small groups and had the opportunity to express their concerns on a more individual and interactive level with study team members and other participants.

Using public input gathered from the May/June and August public meetings, the PDT refined coast wide restoration strategies of plan alternatives and identified potential large-scale restoration concepts for inclusion in the LCA plan alternatives. For example, public comment identified a need to address freshwater management and allocation in the Chenier Plain as part of the LCA restoration effort. As a result of this input, the USACE included this restoration concept for evaluation in plan formulation, and ultimately recommended the inclusion of the Chenier Plain Freshwater Management and Allocation Study as part of the LCA Plan.

At the April scoping meetings, the public was provided the opportunity to comment on the identification of the sorting and critical needs criteria and to provide comment on the application of those criteria to the 79 restoration features identified in Phase V of plan formulation (described in section 3.3 PLAN FORMULATION). This public input was then provided to and considered by the PDT as it: 1) finalized the sorting and critical needs criteria; 2) applied the criteria to the 79 restoration features; and 3) evaluated the LCA plan alternatives. In addition, all oral and written comments were incorporated and addressed in a Scoping Report, which accompanies the PEIS.

5.3 Future Public Involvement

There will be continued opportunities for public participation and input in LCA Plan formulation through public comment on this draft report and the DPEIS. The USACE will conduct public meetings to solicit input on the selection of the TSP, including comment on the TSP components (e.g. near-term priority projects, large-scale studies, demonstration projects, etc.), as well as the TSP implementation procedures. These public meetings are scheduled for July and/or August 2004.

As the LCA Plan transitions from plan formulation to plan implementation, there would also be opportunities for public participation and input. For each of the LCA Plan projects, the requisite decision documents, NEPA documents, and accompanying public participation process would be completed. During this time, the public would have the opportunity to comment on the scope of issues, resources, impacts, and alternatives to be addressed in the DPEIS.

During periods when officially public or scoping meetings are not being held, the USACE, in coordination with the state of Louisiana, would keep open the lines of communication through web site interaction, speaking engagements, workshops, news releases, timelines, frequently asked questions, fact sheets, and talking points. To that end, a Strategic Communications Plan would be established that clearly defines a proactive, consistent, and cohesive procedure for informing the public of the LCA Study process and the development of the TSP.